
The U.S. Army Leads in Humanitarian Demining Training At Maneuver Support Center, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri

By

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In 1996, the Secretary of Defense gave the U.S. Army the task of developing a humanitarian demining training program. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC) established the Humanitarian Demining Training Center (HDTC) in September 1996. The establishment of HDTC was in direct response to the Presidential landmine policy directives of May 1996. The directives included expanding the current U.S. global humanitarian demining program. Humanitarian Demining Training Center conducted the first demining course in December 1996. The center provides support to U.S. governmental agencies, international organizations and most other organizations involved in humanitarian demining. Also, in response to the Presidential directives, the Countermining Training Support Center (CTSC) was established in 1996 to provide conventional soldiers with training in mine awareness and countermining operations. The HDTC and CTSC are co-located and the two centers share facilities and a joint mission statement.

Humanitarian Demining Training Center Training Program

The HDTC provides demining training to Special Operations Forces (SOF) assigned the humanitarian demining training mission. The SOF "A-Teams" trained at Fort Leonard Wood deploy to different theaters around the world to train the indigenous population how to demine. The humanitarian demining training is a two-week "train-the-trainer" course covering the complete demining process. With few exceptions, units typically receive the training at Fort Leonard Wood. The HDTC averages eighteen courses per year. During the two week course students learn about the global landmine problem, U.S. demining policy, mine action surveys and humanitarian demining operations and international standards for mine action. In addition, demolitions, unexploded ordnance mine awareness, and booby traps are discussed specific to the deployment region. The training provides real world exercises for the student. Soldiers are presented realistic simulated mined areas and are required to conduct mine action surveys and demining procedures in accordance with international standards for mine action. Finally, the use of demining tools, heavy equipment and dogs, as well as new technology such as ground penetrating radar systems, are discussed.

The "train-the-trainer" program is designed to prepare the SOF soldiers to train indigenous personnel in the Humanitarian Demining Office (HDO) process. Our training directly supports the U.S. goal of developing a sustainable indigenous HDO program. The indigenous personnel eventually develop their own trainers and conduct their own demining operations. Since its inception, HDTC has trained over seventy SOF A-teams which translates to nearly 850 students. The graduated teams have deployed to over twenty-three countries around the world.

Learning about humanitarian demining is challenging to the student since it requires a different mind-set than they have learned in their previous military training. The conventional tactical approach used in military countermining operations does not fit with the HDO process. For example, safety is paramount, speed of operation is not important and the objective is not to have any casualties when performing HDO procedures. We go to extra steps during the early phases of our training to get this point across. Once the student realizes that HDO operations requires a major paradigm shift, they then can focus on the unique HDO tactics, techniques and procedures. We also emphasize the importance of sound management in all aspects of HDO. Probably the most critical aspect of HDO, students are tasked to role play leadership positions while solving demining problems.

We have found in humanitarian demining keeping up-to-date HDO experiences in our training is crucial. We work hard to gather lessons learned information from the field. Our instructors constantly gather information from international contacts and from A-teams in the field. In addition, we send A-teams to countries to gather lessons learned. Our instructors have been on the ground in Bosnia, Cambodia, Chad, Estonia, Ecuador, Mozambique and Yemen.

The Fort Leonard Wood Attribute

Locating the HDTC at Fort Leonard Wood proved to have many advantages. The U.S. Army Engineer School provides combat engineer and demolition expertise. International soldiers attached to the engineer school provide an excellent source of HDO experiences. The installation recently completed a new multi-million dollar building to house the HDTC. In addition, the installation has dedicated a square kilometer of training area for HDTC practical exercises vicinity the new facility. Also, the installation plans to add an indoor inclement weather facility in the future. Real world environmental challenges are simulated in the local terrain where students are presented with the most difficult demining problems. Additionally, the center interfaces with the Maneuver Support Center's battle labs and research centers located at Fort Wood. New mine detection technology is tested on the post in a live mine field. Finally, a demining research center is proposed to be housed on the new University of Missouri Systems Technology Park located at Fort Wood.

The Center's Credibility

Perhaps more than any other factor, the multi-disciplinary staff has fostered the HDTC's outstanding reputation as a HDO center of expertise. The staff includes personnel with specialties in special operations, explosive ordnance disposal, and combat engineering. Through exchange agreements we are fortunate to augment our staff with a major from the United Kingdom and two warrant officers, one from Australia and one from New Zealand. The international soldiers provide real world experience as deminers and supervisors of deminers in countries such as Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Bosnia. In addition, two contract instructors from RONCO Consulting Corporation who have real world demining experience are on our staff as well.

In addition to training, the center develops training products to support mine awareness and demining training. To support demining operations, the center developed the following training aids: demining hand-tool boxes, mines and unexploded ordnance recognition boards. The demining toolboxes contain hand-tools necessary to support a demining operation. The country specific mine boards contain a two dimensional representation of several mines employed in that

country. Also, we contracted the development of individual training mines using stereo-lithography procedures. The demining training aids are given to SOF teams after their training is complete.

Initiatives

The HDTC is currently in the process of developing a 5-day International Officers' Humanitarian Demining Operations Course. This course will provide the international officer with a familiarization of the HDO process and encourage them to share this information with their countrymen. Additionally, HDTC is providing U.S. input to update the international demining standards for the United Nations. The new international standards will be incorporated into our training program. A new HDO Managers' Course is also proposed for the future. This course is designed to provide training for leadership responsibilities at the national, regional and platoon mine action levels. The HDTC linked its web site to demining organizations in an effort to improve information sharing.

Conclusion

The U.S. Army has built an outstanding HDO training program at Fort Leonard Wood and the basic HDO course is internationally known for its excellence. However, HDO around the world is evolving and so must the supporting training programs. A key focus for the future is "sustainment" of the developing HDO programs in the countries accepted into the U.S. demining program. Fort Leonard Wood is preparing to meet the challenge by developing the International Officers' Course and Management Course.

About the Author

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